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BOOKS

Richard Meltzer — Anna Statman

Rock hoax or treatise?

"The Aesthetics of Rock." By Richard Meltzer. Da Capo Press Inc. Paperback. Illustrated. 338 pages. $10.95.

By Bill Reed
SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

JUST LIKE NEW, improved GLIMMER ("It's a floor wax *and* a dessert topping"), "The Aesthetics of Rock" meant radically disparate things to different readers when it was first published in 1970.

Ostensibly a pioneering volume of rock music criticism, this somewhat infamous pop cult classic was also perceived by many readers as a serious philosophical critique. And then there were others who viewed the book primarily as a highly humorous parody of intellectual exegesis that still managed to contain more than a germ of eschatological truth. Some book reviewers dismiss "The Aesthetics of Rock" as mere hoax.

Now, 17 years later, Meltzer's folly is back in print once more to confound and invite controversy. And amuse. For, however deadly earnest Meltzer might be, it remains difficult to stifle laughter in the face of his forging links between the world views of, say, uh, Aristotle and Paul Revere and the Raiders. And surely "The Aesthetics of Rock" must be the only book ever to contain both Little Peggy ("I Will Follow Him") March in its index along with 19th century German lapsed Hegelian philosopher, Ludwig Feuerbach.

In his new foreword to the text, which remains gloriously untinkered with, the still productive writer explains why he has, ironically, forsworn rock music altogether and become an unreconstructed *at* aficionado.

"Rock, when it's totally glorious... can go from A-Z — no sweat — instantaneously.... Today, whatever I hear has trouble doing a credible A... can at least always be counted on for a good solid A, and usually B, C, D as well."

Bearing no resemblance to current so-called rock criticism, most of which operates almost solely as a function of what Meltzer has called elsewhere "the record industry food chain," "The Aesthetics of Rock's" writing style often overlaps into the terrain of what is termed by structuralist critic Roland Barthes as "bliss text," i.e., words as pure sound, music and shapes on a page rather than as language *qua* language.

It isn't so startling, then, to learn that this timeless document was first issued by the now defunct Something Else Press, which specialized in publishing works by the experimental likes of Gertrude Stein and John Cage.

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